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THE NEW INTERRELATION BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE DIRECTORS AND ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CHAIRMEN (31) MET DURING A 3-DAY CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION. THREE BASIC AREAS WERE APPROACHED--(1) THE PRESENT STATUS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING, (2) THE PROMOTION OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION BY ENGLISH TEACHERS, AND (3) THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM AS SUPPORT FOR NEW METHODS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION. EACH OF THE AREAS WAS FURTHER DIVIDED INTO FIVE SHARPLY FOCUSED QUESTIONS. WORK PAPERS WERE PRESENTED AND PROVIDED THE BASIS FOR DISCUSSION. SIX PROJECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH WERE RECOMMENDED. THE FOLLOWING WERE SUGGESTED AS AREAS OF CONCENTRATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES--ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND GREAT BOOKS, EXPERIMENTATION OF A PRACTICAL NATURE, AND APPLICABILITY OF AUDIOLINGUAL METHODS. REPORTS IN THIS SERIES ARE ED 003 940 THROUGH ED 003 960. (RS)

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THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

The New Interrelation between First and Second Language Learning

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The New Interrelation between First and Second Language Learning

By John H. Fisher, *Conference Director*

THIS Conference, which was held at Indiana University on 17-19 March 1961 under the auspices of the United States Office of Education, brought together twelve directors of Foreign Language Institutes and the chairmen of twelve large Departments of English throughout the United States[1] and addressed itself to three basic questions: (I) What is the status of foreign language teaching today? (II) How can English teachers promote the general purposes of foreign language instruction? (III) How can the English curriculum support the new methods in foreign language education?

Each question was subdivided into five sharply focussed ones of central interest to the teaching profession:

I. 1. Have the objectives of the foreign language profession really undergone a profound change? 2. What resistance has been, or is still being, encountered from members of the profession who do not approve of these changes? 3. What role does literary history and critical analysis still play in departments where the new approaches are cultivated? 4. Has emphasis upon the tool and social aspects of language affected the number and caliber of students studying foreign languages? 5. Has cultivation of the new approaches created any problems in staffing or organization of foreign language departments? E.g., has it affected criteria for promotion?

II. 1. Can we agree that every English student and teacher should be master of a foreign language and literature? If so, to that end, would English departments be willing to make meaningful FL proficiency requirements for the B.A., M.A., Ph.D.? 2. How can we encourage English teachers to make reading in a foreign language part of their regular professional reading, and reference to foreign language and foreign literature part of their normal teaching procedure? 3. Can world literature and comparative literature courses be utilized to sharpen the students' awareness of language? (By combining the English and FL staff? By emphasizing the inadequacy of translation? By assigning some reading in the FL, even on the elementary level?) 4. Can English teachers be persuaded to support FL learning actively in school and community affairs? (By supporting the place of FLs in a program of general education? By supporting the place of FLs in teacher education? By supporting the cause of FLs in PTA and other community discussion?)

III. 1. Would more attention on the part of English teachers to the nature of language and the psychology of language learning be of any real service to language teachers? Is there any evidence one way or the other? Is this a possible area for research? 2. The Language Arts Program of the NCTE stresses "listening" as a specific objective of the curriculum: Brooks lists this as one of the first objectives of FL teaching. Are two different levels of comprehension involved, or would some emphasis on listening in English prepare the student for learning an FL? 3. Is there any way that English on any level can stress audio-lingual objectives in such a way as to support the FL method? (In usage dr...? In sharpening the sense of style? In distinguishing dialectal pronunciation? In teaching spelling and punctuation? In teaching phonetic and/or phonemic transcription?) 4. Does linguistics have anything more than (1) information about the nature of language and (2) information about the sounds and structure of the spoken language to contribute to either FL or English teaching? Does structural or descriptive analysis have any pedagogical value? 5. What can English teaching do to reinforce the area approach to the FLs? 6. Would the "language arts" and "communications" approach to English be more helpful to the FLs than the "literature" approach. How would such non-literary approaches to composition accord with the objectives of the Articulated English Program and the Commission on English?

Three work papers provided a basis for discussion. In the first Nelson Brooks (Yale) stressed the need for foreign language teachers to continue to seek aid from the philosophers, the cultural anthropologists, the psychologists, and the descriptive linguists. He noted the new directions taken in many language classrooms towards the hearing, speaking, reading, writing sequence, the resistance that this approach still meets, and the materials now in the making for testing accomplishment in these four skills. He concluded with two points of major interest to teachers of English:

1) As we have turned away from the relating of English to the foreign language and have instead taught the foreign language in terms of itself, we have reduced the role of English to the vanishing point. Nevertheless some use is made of English, especially to establish semantic meaning at early levels. Our greatest single problem is the management of English so that it can be of maximum use without negating our principal objective: to use the FL as it is used in the foreign culture, in which, obviously, English plays no part at all.

2) As we program the learning of the language

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skills and their accompaniment of structure and vocabulary, we are increasingly aware of our *other two objectives: cultural insight* and *literary acquaintance.* We now conceive of our language courses as divided up into five or six different levels, with greater concern for the second and third of these objectives as the student advances.

In the second work paper, John H. Fisher (Indiana) raised the basic issue of whether English teachers are interested in or ready to join in a calculated call upon the resources of the philosopher, psychologist, cultural anthropologist, and descriptive linguist to help revolutionize the teaching of English, and thus to create in their courses an atmosphere with which the foreign language student and teacher are familiar, and which in turn will support the efforts of the foreign language teachers. He commented on the usefulness to English of each of the associated fields and raised the question as to "whether English composition or literature can ever be taught by anyone who does not have real command of a foreign language and literature." He saw four areas of possible interrelationship between English and foreign language learning: (1) Concentration on language teaching as a principal objective of the profession. (2) Mutual interest in the philosophy and psychology of language as a basis for language learning. (3) Mutual awareness of the primacy of the spoken language, structural analysis, phonemic theory, audio-lingual drill, language laboratories. (4) Recognition of the reinforcement provided by contrasts between the sounds and systems of various languages.

Albert H. Marckwardt (Michigan), in the third work paper, argued the point "Interrelationship—to what extent," basing his discussion upon Mr. Fisher's suggestion that the objective of English instruction is to "improve the comprehension and composition of native speakers of English." As a linguist Mr. Marckwardt noted the attainment of a child of six of basic English structures and of a large passive vocabulary. We need to know more than we do about the ways in which the basic syntactical patterns are expanded. In reading we are neither teaching a child of six the language nor expanding his control of it. His repertoire is far in excess of the "Run, Dick, run" pattern. The teaching of reading is initially accustoming the pupil to a new set of equations between written symbols and sounds. At some point the meaning of these equations occurs with lightning-like rapidity. After this point comes the need for practice and extension to more difficult levels. By the time foreign language study begins the principal tasks have already been accomplished in English.

The problem in teaching writing is possibly twofold: helping the student to master the differences imposed upon the written language by the lack of such elements as stress, intonation, and juncture; encouraging a fluency on paper which at least approaches the readiness with which he will talk about something which interests him. One of these is primarily linguistic; the other possibly psychological. As we approach the final years of secondary school and ultimately college or university, rhetorical considerations occupy a more prominent position. The concern of the foreign language teacher is more likely to remain on the linguistic level.

Hence the three stages of learning occur in English: informal learning, formal learning, and technical learning. The first is behavior acquired by imitation of elders and peers, the second by admonition and correction largely unaided by a rationale, the third by example, rule, and a rationale.

The questions therefore are: "what aspects or phases of both native and foreign language can best be imparted through formal learning and what may the role of technical learning be?"

Discussion: In the ensuing discussion of the question of whether English teachers could learn anything from the foreign language experience, no clear answer appeared. It was felt that English would have a harder time than the foreign languages in achieving a renaissance, since the two factors which helped the FL renaissance—the audio-lingual method and the tape recorder—have less obvious applicability for advanced language study. The audio-lingual method helps produce the mastery of language patterns that a native speaker has by the time that he is five. The tape recorder, which never tires and is always available, allows the student to listen as many hours as he wishes, thus making it possible for him to come a bit closer to the total immersion in which the child finds himself in his native environment. As will be discussed below, neither the audio-lingual method nor the tape recorder has yet been found to have much use in teaching clarity of statement, organization of material, or style of expression.

Both English and foreign language teachers desire to get second language learning out of college and back into its proper sphere in the elementary and secondary schools. It was felt that English and foreign language teachers could work together to their mutual advantage in eliminating repetition and duplication in successive levels of their courses. If they could agree that certain elements of grammar and content material could be introduced at specific levels, and certain literary types or terminology for literary analysis be introduced at other specific levels, work in English and foreign languages could reinforce each other, and—even more important—students would be spared the boredom and discouragement of having to repeat the same drills and read the same materials in nearly every grade from junior high school through the freshman year in college.

Frequently the discussion returned to the question of what specific contributions the science of linguistics had made to the new methods in foreign language teaching, and how this science was to be related to English instruction. In the first place, there was repeated assertion that one of the ways in which English could most support foreign language learning was by itself becoming more language conscious. James Squire reminded the group that the recent NCTE study, *The National Interest and the Teaching of English*, contained figures showing that only 20% of English teachers are required to take courses in grammar and usage beyond the freshman year in college, and only 15% are required to take a course in the nature or structure of language. This means that no matter how expert they may become in reading and writing through the study of literature, English teachers lack the fundamental attitude and knowledge that will enable them to discuss language as an independent phenomenon in a way that would assist the foreign language teacher.

Several foreign language participants argued that there are sufficient grounds of agreement among all shades of present-day linguists to be of great use to the teacher, and that it is only when we pass on to the more esoteric realm of theory and speculation that the differences become significant. The common ground underlies such assumptions as: 1) The importance of pattern in language; 2) The difference between speech and writing; 3) The rejection of authority in favor of descriptive and analytic procedure; 4) The independence of each language system; 5) The importance of distinctive contrast in sound and structure.

Since, however, little evidence yet exists that the audio-lingual method would assist domestic English teaching, the group felt that it was premature to consider whether features of it could be introduced into English classes simply to help the foreign languages. While English teachers should encourage students to study foreign languages in every way possible, and while they should bend every effort to increase their language consciousness and to make them aware of the way language works, they have their own rather formidable task to perform and they cannot undertake to import materials or methods that are of no evident assistance to the performance of this task. On the whole, this group showed little interest in

teaching students in classes of English composition phonetic transcription or dialect geography.

Recommendations: Six projects for further research were suggested:

(1) A controlled study (over a period of years) in English composition and literature sections, with some classes taught by instructors committed to increasing the student's linguistic consciousness, and making as many connections with foreign languages as possible, along with other sections taught in the traditional way. The experiment would be followed up by observation and testing to see whether more students in the linguistic sections continued their foreign languages beyond the minimum and did better in them.

(2) Use of great books to bolster interest in foreign languages—an experiment with a monolingual teacher and with one familiar with the languages of the foreign texts, to determine the values of allusion to the original text, and of the teacher's cultural orientation to the society which produced the original.

(3) Study of the connection between the biological and psychological factors of language learning. At what age is grammatical analysis most valuable, and drill in structure and organization most useful? At what age should the relation between speaking and writing be explored? Conversely, at what age should the reading be concerned with mythology and folktale, at what age with heroic literature and lyrics, at what age with drama and the novel, at what age with cultural and intellectual materials of a more abstract sort? All of this investigation should be pointed towards eliminating the wasteful and intellectually frustrating duplication of drill and material that goes on year after year in both English and foreign language classrooms.

(4) Experimentation with regard to the practical value of philosophical and psychological orientation to language on the part of teacher and student. No one objects to the proposition that the more a teacher knows, the better he is; but there is evidently real question as to whether three or six hours of an already too-limited major should be surrendered to theoretical discussion of this sort. Experimental and control groups and testing over a period of years might help determine what kind and how much of such material is actually useful.

(5) Extensive research to determine the applicability of audio-lingual methods to English instruction. English classes should not be required to teach phonetic alphabets, or structural analysis, or the use of the language laboratory simply for the sake of assisting the foreign languages. But if such matters improved English teaching, they would have an important by-product in supporting foreign language study. No one yet knows how useful they may be in teaching English composition. Experimental classes should be established in which every aspect of composition takes off from the audio-lingual: spelling from work with pronunciation and enunciation; vocabulary and sentence structure from listening to taped drill passages, repeating them, and filling out and altering constructions orally on tape; comprehension and style from listening to taped readings of difficult prose and poetry both with the text before one and without the text. Experimentation would turn up many ways in which audio-lingual method could be utilized in the English classroom, and testing against control groups would help ascertain which ones of these were actually beneficial to the objectives of English.

(6) A series of conferences similar to this one should be held for the continuing discussion of common problems.